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ABSTRACT

Strengthening technology in Louisiana's public libraries will support equitable and convenient access to electronic information resources for all citizens at library sites, in homes, and in business. The plan presented in this document is intended to enhance and expand technology in the state's public libraries. After discussion of the crucial role of public libraries, the status of public libraries in Louisiana, and the role of the State Library of Louisiana, goals for the next five years are outlined and specific objectives for each are described. The goals encompass the needs of both the public library community and the State Library, and include the following: (1) provide the technical infrastructure necessary for equitable and convenient access to electronic information resources; (2) provide access to electronic resources to meet citizens' information needs; (3) provide State Library assistance to public libraries in improving technology services to Louisiana's citizens; and (4) secure the necessary funding to support technology in public libraries. (AEF)

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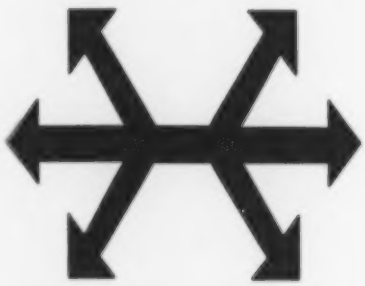

A PLAN FOR LOUISIANA'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES

STATE LIBRARY OF LOUISIANA
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IMPROVING INFORMATION ACCESS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY:

A PLAN FOR LOUISIANA'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES

THE CHALLENGE:

Many of Louisiana's citizens are in danger of being "left behind" in today's fast-moving world of digital information, to the detriment not only of countless individual lives, but also of the state as a whole. Improvement in both education and economic development demands that Louisiana's citizens have digital access to a wide variety of information.

THE ANSWER:

Strengthening technology in Louisiana's public libraries will support equitable and convenient access to electronic information resources for all citizens — at library sites, in homes, and in businesses. Public libraries are uniquely positioned, both philosophically and practically, to make statewide access a reality.

But appropriate resources will be necessary. For example, at present there are only about 300 computer workstations available to Louisiana's citizens through public libraries — so each workstation must provide service to an average of *14,300* people.

THE BLUEPRINT:

The State Library of Louisiana presents the following plan to enhance and expand technology in the state's public libraries. The plan contains goals for the next five years.

The goals encompass the needs of both the public library community and the State Library, the latter playing a supporting role to the former. The technology plan has been developed in coordination with other State Library plans and public library technology plans. It will be updated on a yearly basis to incorporate recent achievements and to detail plans for future years.

GOAL 1: Provide the technical infrastructure necessary for equitable and convenient access to electronic information resources.

- Provide, in all public library facilities, multiple workstations which support graphical and World Wide Web interfaces and are suited to the needs of the local community.
- Extend electronic services through the public library to citizens at home and in businesses.
- Completely and fully automate those libraries not already fully automated.
- Establish electronic linkages among libraries, to enhance resource-sharing.
- Use technology to extend and enhance library and information services to those citizens with special needs (*e.g.*, those who are disabled, underserved, or unskilled).
- Work in partnership with LLN, OTM, industry, and government to ensure adequate, affordable technology in libraries.

(continued)

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GOAL 2: Provide access to electronic resources to meet citizen's information needs.

- Link libraries electronically to information providers, including educational, social, government, health care, and commercial information services.
- Make state documents available electronically.
- Improve access to local and state government information through the Louisiana Government Information Network (LaGIN) and through the Division of Administration's INFO Louisiana website.
- Enhance resource-sharing programs by using technology to support ILL operations.

GOAL 3: Provide State Library assistance to public libraries in improving technology services to Louisiana's citizens.

- Expand the knowledge and experience of State Library staff to support the goals of the statewide technology plan.
- Provide technology training to public library staff on a regular and timely basis.
- Assist public library systems in efforts to train citizens in the use of technology and electronic information resources.
- Conduct surveys and studies to track the extent and use of technology in delivering service.
- Partner with relevant organizations and businesses to ensure adequate, affordable technology in libraries.

GOAL 4: Secure the necessary funding to support technology in public libraries.

- Leverage funding from state, federal, and private sources to support technology development and enhancement.
- Secure regular funding to ensure that public library resources cover the ongoing costs of technology and electronic information.

In Conclusion

In less than a century, the use of advanced information technology has moved beyond the province of science fiction to become an integral part of modern life. But to achieve its enormous potential to enhance education, business, and the overall quality of life, information technology must not be exclusionary. Louisiana's public libraries are working to ensure that all citizens can benefit from this technology. Adequate support and funding of these efforts is nothing less than an investment in Louisiana's future.

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GOAL 3: Provide State Library assistance to public libraries in improving technology services to Louisiana's citizens.

GOAL 4: Secure the necessary funding to support technology in public libraries.

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The Crucial Role of Public Libraries

Public libraries are a cornerstone of democracy, providing critical information resources.

The vast majority of U.S. citizens do not currently own home computers, and only one in seven households has Internet access.

Improvement in both education and economic development demands digital access to a wide variety of information.

Public libraries are a cornerstone of democracy. They provide critical resources to educate and inform citizens, to ensure just and principled government, to improve business and economic development, and to preserve and share our culture. In support of intellectual freedom, public libraries ensure equal and ready access to information for all citizens.

Public libraries connect people to information by identifying, retrieving, organizing, and facilitating access to a complex array of information resources. They also provide instruction and training to citizens.

Furthermore, public libraries provide important resources to the many citizens who cannot afford to own books or computers.

While libraries have traditionally supplied information through books and other printed material, it must be stressed that libraries have always been, above all, *information providers*. Books are just one of the technologies used to fulfill that role. Increasingly, there are electronic tools that promise information access undreamed of in the traditional library setting. Now, for the first time, there exists the very real prospect of the smallest rural library providing information access comparable to that of the largest metropolitan library.

Although computers and modems are becoming more common, the vast majority of U.S. citizens do not currently own computers. Despite advertising claims to the contrary, access to the Internet is far from universal. A 1997 survey indicates that only one in seven U.S. households has access to the Internet.[1]

But improvement in both education and economic development demands digital access to government information, business and job opportunities, consumer and health information, organizations, and research resources, through computers and inexpensive long-distance communication networks.

[1] American Library Association, Office of Information Technology Policy, "The 1997 National Survey of U.S. Public Libraries and the Internet" (November 1997 Summary Results).

Public libraries serve a crucial need by providing technology to the people who, for various reasons, do not or cannot access the power of the Internet. Public libraries expand the reach of technology, keeping up-to-date with new electronic resources and telecommunication options, and serving the nation's many "information have-nots."

But adequate financial resources are not always available at local public libraries, especially since they must continue to provide the print resources upon which many citizens rely, in addition to offering access to the proliferation of electronic information resources and meeting public demand for access to the Internet. In other words, libraries are being squeezed as they seek to continue their tradition of providing access to information through whatever combination of technologies is most effective.

Public libraries serve a crucial need by providing technology, but many are being squeezed by dramatically increasing demands in today's information environment.

The Status of Public Libraries in Louisiana

Louisiana currently has 65 main library facilities, at least one in each parish. These main facilities operate 259 branch libraries and 34 mobile libraries (bookmobiles or book vans).

A 1994 grant from the U.S. Department of Education to support the Louisiana Library Network (LLN) gave every main public library facility in Louisiana a workstation with a connection to the Internet. The LLN links libraries in the University System with public library system headquarters and selected school libraries throughout the state. It is managed by staff at Louisiana State University and operates on the state's fiber optic network.

Although the LLN provides access to the Internet and selected databases for some public libraries, it is not currently suffi-

With only about 300 workstations available to citizens through public libraries, each workstation must provide service to an average of 14,300 citizens.

Louisiana's public libraries are struggling to pay for electronic technology.

The level of technology available in the state's public libraries is quite uneven, due to differing tax bases and the limitations of local economies. For example, rural libraries are more likely to have limited technology, yet nearly two-thirds *of Louisiana's public library systems are in rural areas.*

cient in size or ability to provide the full range of services needed in all public libraries. Today, about half of Louisiana's 65 public library systems have multiple workstations providing public access to the Internet. Of the 325 public library buildings in Louisiana (including the State Library), 181 have workstations offering unmediated patron access to the Internet for Louisiana's 4.3 million citizens. With approximately 300 workstations[2] available to citizens through public libraries, each workstation must provide service to an average of 14,300 citizens.

Furthermore, only about half of the 65 public library systems in the state have fully integrated automation systems (to support registration and circulation modules, online public access catalogs, electronic serials access and control, etc.). Automation systems in libraries not only allow improved operational efficiency, but also provide a base of technology to support all future developments.

Funding has not been available in Louisiana to provide public libraries with multiple workstations or with upgraded, graphical interface to electronic resources. According to 1996 Louisiana public library statistics, 10 of the 65 library systems provide Internet access only through staff workstations. (In other words, in these libraries citizens have only mediated access to electronic resources). Twenty-three library systems have only one public access workstation each for citizens. Only three public library systems in Louisiana have more than ten workstations for public access. Branch libraries are much less likely than main libraries to have computers and workstations.

Despite discounted telecommunications costs made possible by the Louisiana Public Service Commission since 1995, public libraries struggle to pay for electronic technology. Each connection to the network costs $110/month; access to databases on LLN costs from $225 to $1,250 annually. In addition, funds are needed to purchase necessary hardware and software.

The level of technology available in Louisiana's public libraries is uneven due to differing tax bases and the limita-

[2] About half of these workstations provide text-only access to the Internet.

tions of local economies. Rural libraries often have more difficulty in acquiring and using technology than do urban libraries — even though technology can offer rural libraries great advantages in serving the needs of geographically scattered populations and isolated patrons.

Nationally, only one in ten rural public libraries offers patron access to the World Wide Web. In comparison, one in three city public libraries offers Web access. In Louisiana, rural libraries are more likely to have few workstations and limited access to electronic resources; yet nearly two-thirds of the state's public library systems are located in rural areas.

It is a truism of modern life that technology grows increasingly critical to economic development, education, and overall quality of life. Louisiana seeks improvement in all of these areas. Of the 50 states, Louisiana has the highest poverty rate, the highest percentage of school-age children living in poverty, and the lowest rate of public high school graduation. In addition, Louisiana ranks near the bottom in other economic measures, such as median household income (47th), percent of population receiving public aid (47th), average salary of teachers (48th), percent of population without health insurance (45th), teenage birth rate (45th), and infant mortality rate (44th).[3]

State-of-the-art access to technology through public libraries would lay the foundation for new ways of improving the lives of many citizens throughout Louisiana.

Louisiana seeks improvement in economic development, education, and overall quality of life. Technology is critical to all three.

State-of-the-art access to technology through public libraries would lay the foundation for new ways to improve the lives of many citizens throughout Louisiana.

[3] From *State Rankings 1996: A Statistical View of the 50 United States.*

The Role of the State Library of Louisiana

Technology is the uppermost concern of public libraries in Louisiana. Accordingly, the State Library of Louisiana concentrates its efforts on developing the public libraries into state-of-the-art agencies for the delivery of information, education, culture, and recreation to all citizens.

VISION STATEMENT:
Louisiana's Library Technology Plan

Louisiana's public library systems
will use technology
to provide
equitable and convenient access
to electronic information resources
to all citizens of Louisiana
at library sites,
in homes, and in businesses.

Public libraries have benefited from recent grants administered by the State Library in support of technology, including both state aid and federal funds from the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). The State Library has increased its technical staff in order to provide additional services, training, and consulting in regard to technology and electronic information resources.

In partnership with such agencies as LLN, the State Office of Telecommunications Management (OTM), Louisiana Public Services Commission, Louisiana Database Commission, the Board of Regents for Higher Education, and the State Department of Education, the State Library works to transform into reality its vision of technology for the betterment of Louisiana and its citizens.

Making It Happen: The Goals

1) PROVIDE THE TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE NECESSARY FOR EQUITABLE AND CONVENIENT ACCESS TO ELECTRONIC INFORMATION RESOURCES.

- Provide, in all public library facilities, multiple workstations which support graphical and World Wide Web interfaces and are suited to the needs of the local community.
- Extend electronic services through the public library to citizens at home and in businesses.
- Completely and fully automate those libraries not already fully automated.
- Establish electronic linkages among libraries, to enhance resource-sharing.
- Use technology to extend and enhance library and information services to those citizens with special needs (*e.g.*, those who are disabled, underserved, or unskilled).
- Work in partnership with LLN, OTM, industry, and government to ensure adequate, affordable technology in libraries.

2) PROVIDE ACCESS TO ELECTRONIC RESOURCES TO MEET CITIZENS' INFORMATION NEEDS.

- Link libraries electronically to information providers, including educational, social, government, health care, and commercial information services.
- Make state documents available electronically.
- Improve access to local and state government information through the Louisiana Government Information Network (LaGIN) and through the Division of Administration's INFO Louisiana website.
- Enhance resource-sharing programs by using technology to support ILL operations.

3) PROVIDE STATE LIBRARY ASSISTANCE TO PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN IMPROVING TECHNOLOGY SERVICES TO LOUISIANA'S CITIZENS.

- Expand the knowledge and experience of State Library staff to support the goals of the statewide technology plan.
- Provide technology training to public library staff on a regular and timely basis.
- Assist public library systems in efforts to train citizens in the use of technology and electronic information resources.
- Conduct surveys and studies to track the extent and use of technology in delivering service.
- Partner with relevant organizations and businesses to ensure adequate, affordable technology in libraries.

4) SECURE THE NECESSARY FUNDING TO SUPPORT TECHNOLOGY IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

- Leverage funding from state, federal, and private sources to support technology development and enhancement.
- Secure regular funding to ensure that public library resources cover the ongoing costs of technology and electronic information.

In Conclusion

In less than a century, the use of high technology has moved beyond the province of science fiction to become an integral part of modern life. This is especially true of information technology.

But to achieve its enormous potential to enhance education, business, and the overall quality of life, information technology must not be exclusionary.

Public libraries in Louisiana are uniquely positioned — both philosophically and practically — to ensure that all citizens of the state can benefit from this technology.

Adequate support and funding of their efforts is nothing less than an investment in Louisiana's future.

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